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Letter from William McKinney to His Cousin Martha McKinney, April 24, 1862

William M. McKinney

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Camp near Pittsburg Landing April 24th 1862

My dear cousin Mattie.

On my feet again and able to walk around Camp, though not able for duty, though I expect our Officers will have me on duty again by to-morrow. I am still very weak, have got as poor as a "Church mouse", am at least thirty pounds lighter than when you last saw me, and that much loss for a small man like your cousin, is quite considerable. But you know the Mth - 7 failing, or at least one of them, which is endurance, or in common terms, a "hangar-tiveness"; and I think I have that to an excess. So you may expect to hear of me "sticking to my colors" as long as I can move a finger, unless I should happen to get mad at somebody, and then you may expect to see me very soon. My Captain came back two days ago, and has taken command of the Company again, relieving me of quite a burden. I do not know how long we will remain here, nor do I know anything of any movements. All such things are kept by the General Commanding, as profound secrets, until the day we are ordered to move, and then we do not know where we are going until we get there. So when you want any information about any contemplated movement, ask any one else, sooner than anyone connected with the Army under a Commanding General. Gen Pope is here, camped within two miles of us, with his command of some 20,000 men. It may be possible that Mitchell's Battery is with him, but I cannot get away from Camp, else I would visit his Division and inquire after the "lads". I sent one of my boys to the 1st Regt the other day to inquire after Perrine, he saw Lieut Lomax, your uncle, who said Perrine was

wounded, how badly, I did not learn; but perhaps he is at home by this time, as all the wounded who could be safely moved, were sent home immediately after the Battle. You doubtless know more of him by this time than I do myself. I am still of the opinion, that I will be with you by the 4th of July, provided I do not fall in any battle that may be fought, as many did in this last one. It seems from the returns of the killed and wounded, that a much larger proportion of Officers than men, were either killed or wounded. I learned from several prisoners, that they were instructed by their commanders, before going into battle, to pick off all the Officers they could see, and thus disorganize the Regiments and Companies as much as possible, and which had its effect, for when the Officers fall, and the men see they have no one to lead them, none upon whom to rely, they will not stand and fight very long. So long as the Officers are with them, they seem to feel perfectly safe, though their own comrades may be falling on all sides of them; this seems rather strange, but it is nevertheless the fact. One of our Gunboats captured a little Rebel Gunboat and small Steam Boat up the River yesterday, that had ventured out of the Muscle Shoals after one of our Steam Boats that had run aground on a sand bar. Just as these little Rebel boats, thought they had their prize, one of our Gun Boats suddenly appeared, and captured them both. Small fish should keep near the shore when whales are about. It does seem to me the Rebels would soon get tired of this kind of warfare, when they are beaten and repulsed at every move they make. If they do not make a stand somewhere soon, they will not have ground enough to stand on. But it may be, they will make stand enough to satisfy the most ardent and war loving of us, yet, but I say, let them stand and try fight.

Well, I hardly know what to write this time. I have no
gasp to write and do not feel in a gasping humor. I expect
you will remark to yourself, "that it is the first time I ever knew of
his gasping properties to fail," nevertheless it is a fact. I have been
sick so long, that I have lost that quality so peculiar to the
family, no insinuation meant, nor reference to an allusion.

I think you are losing your taste for letter writing or else
getting tired of the correspondence, yours seem to be much less
frequent, than a few weeks ago. I am not certain that you
are yet even with me. I know you would not be, were I
not compelled to travel about so much, and have so
little time to write. If the war should continue
much longer and I could get the chance to make
a few more such voyages as I did from Nashville
to this place, I would soon be quite a traveler. I have
been all over the West and will soon have ~~traveled~~
over the South in various ways and directions. We are
now within 15 miles of the Mississippi line, away down in
Dixie, I hope to get through to the Gulf yet, and return home
by the way of New York and the Lakes. I think I would
be ready to be mustered out of service then, and return
home and see the Fatherland awhile. I intend, after the
war is over, to settle down, and be a quiet, sober fellow,
sowing soon all the "wild oats" I wish, more perhaps, than
I will ever be able to reap. But I really believe I was
born to be a Rover, what do you think, do you not think
that sewing suits my style exactly? Or have you an opinion
at all concerning your very extravagant, wilful, woolf,
and whimsical Cousin Wm McKissack